



RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP INC.

DRAFT 2019/20 CITY OF DARWIN MUNICIPAL PLAN

SUBMISSION

JUNE 2019



Rapid Creek on City of Darwin land between McMillans Road and Henry Wrigley Drive

Photo by Paul Sacklyn

RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP

The Rapid Creek Landcare Group's (RCLG) members help look after Rapid Creek through working bees, undertaking revegetation projects, by promoting awareness about the creek and by advocating for better management throughout the catchment. The group works to implement the *Rapid Creek Management Plan* (co-published by the Darwin City Council).

BUSHLAND AT RAPID CREEK

Rapid Creek is an extremely highly valued environmental asset with its entire catchment being contained within the City of Darwin. It is rare and special to have such an asset in the middle of a capital city. The bushland at Rapid Creek contains significant and sensitive native vegetation providing important habitat for wildlife. The bushland is also valued for its aesthetic and passive recreational attributes.

Rapid Creek is utilised by members of the community for activities including walking, cycling, relaxing, picnicing and birdwatching. People are often observed spending quiet time in the tranquil bushland settings by the creek. Rapid Creek is also utilised as an educational resource by primary, secondary and tertiary students and by community groups such as Junior Rangers.

The *Rapid Creek Management Plan* was developed in 1994 and updated in 2000. The plan was reviewed and implemented by the Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee and is a key reference document for the more recent Rapid Creek Water Advisory Committee of which City of Darwin is a stakeholder member. The plan has strategies that include habitat conservation through managing remnant vegetation communities and adjoining open space using revegetation, regeneration, weed and fire management and access control. It is a useful resource for managing bushland in the catchment.

CITY OF DARWIN BUSHLAND

The information in this submission relates to City of Darwin bushland at Rapid Creek which is the area of primary interest, but it also applies more widely to all of City of Darwin bushland. The City of Darwin owns significant areas of native bushland and these areas contribute to a number of strategic actions from *A Strategic Plan for the City of Darwin*:

- Strategic Direction 2 - A Safe, Liveable and Healthy City: Implement programs that will ensure Darwin is recognised for its urban forests and as a leader in tropical design; Provide an accessible network of Council parks and recreation facilities that encourage active living for all ages and abilities
- Strategic Direction 3 - A Cool, Clean and Green City: Develop a Greening Darwin Strategy; Deliver projects that will cool the Darwin City Centre; Ensure Council open spaces contribute to the city's biodiversity

Well managed bushland provides important, non-irrigated, low maintenance green places that contribute to Darwin's biodiversity and improve aesthetics and liveability throughout the city. However poorly managed bushland can have negative qualities: it can become weed infested, which in turn can lead to uncontrolled fires; litter accumulates becoming unsightly; inappropriate vehicle access occurs leading to dumping of waste, erosion, spread of weeds and other activities which decrease bushland amenity.

DRAFT MUNICIPAL PLAN

RCLG made a submission to the City of Darwin's draft Municipal Plan in 2017 (see Appendix). The information in that submission still stands. It is disappointing that the current draft Municipal Plan still does not mention bushland, or native vegetation, in any instance or context.

MANAGEMENT OF RAPID CREEK BUSHLAND ON CITY OF DARWIN LAND

Positive initiatives

RCLG commends the City of Darwin for their ongoing support to our landcare work over the years. This has included financial and in-kind support to rehabilitation projects carried out by our volunteers on a range of sites throughout the catchment (e.g. alongside the creek between McMillans Road and the Water Gardens, in the Yankee Pools area, and more recently our efforts on the mangrove edges downstream from Trower Road). We look forward to such support continuing.

We also acknowledge City of Darwin initiatives that have included community events in their implementation (e.g. the initial rehabilitation of the acquired land on the Jingili side of the creek behind the rural blocks and the riparian restoration work on the eastern side of the creek upstream of McMillans Road).

The efforts the City of Darwin has put into applying to rezone a substantial section of the creek's corridor to Conservation zoning (basically all of the City of Darwin bushland at Rapid Creek upstream from McMillans Road) are greatly appreciated. This area covers some of the most significant habitat in the creek's system and the rezoning will be an important action to protect it into the long term.

The RCLG was pleased to see the airports' new rising sewer main drilled under the creek, rather than being trenched by clearing important and sensitive native vegetation as originally planned. We understand this was a result of efforts by the City of Darwin as the landholder.

Areas for improvement

Whilst we understand that there are numerous constraints, we consider that giving bushland management a higher priority and managing it in a more strategic fashion would achieve better outcomes. Following are two examples of situations that could be improved:

- We have observed many instances where significant resources have been utilised to rehabilitate City of Darwin bushland, these have often included community events involving volunteers. Whilst some ongoing management may have occurred it has often been the case that management has lapsed, leading to the areas becoming degraded, weeds establishing leading to fires, and much of the good work being undone. Sometimes management is reinstated at a later stage, often to lapse again. The area on the Millner side of Rapid Creek immediately downstream from the red footbridge is a case in point as this site has seen a number of such cycles occur. The site is currently in poor condition. Our volunteers, who were involved in a number of community initiatives at the site, have expressed the feeling that their efforts may have been in vain.

- Another issue is that foliar spraying of weeds on bushland is sometimes started too late in the season. When it does occur the weeds are so advanced that it makes effective control difficult or impossible, many weeds have already produced seed, and the large fuel loads create a fire hazard. This appears to have been the case at many City of Darwin bushland sites in the recent season with weed management not commencing until well into the new year, instead of with the first rains at the beginning of the wet season.

It makes good financial sense to ensure bushland management is well planned, continuous and closely monitored. We look forward to bushland on City of Darwin land being given a higher priority and as a result producing many positive benefits to residents and visitors in Darwin.

Rapid Creek Landcare Group Inc.
www.rapidcreek.org.au
info@rapidcreek.org.au

APPENDIX

RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP'S 2017 SUBMISSION TO THE CITY OF DARWIN'S DRAFT MUNICIPAL PLAN

The Rapid Creek Landcare Group is disappointed that the draft Municipal Plan does not refer to the highly valued bushland areas under the City of Darwin's control, including parts of the Rapid Creek catchment. The Darwin City Council was a co-publisher of the *Rapid Creek Management Plan* which guides all stakeholders in the catchment. It has many strategies for habitat conservation and other relevant issues.

We appreciate the effort the City of Darwin puts into managing its bushland areas in the Rapid Creek catchment in line with the management plan. We also appreciate the efforts the City of Darwin has recently put into applying to rezone a substantial section of the creek's corridor to Conservation zoning and are currently awaiting the NT Government's response to this.

In the draft Municipal Plan the East Point Reserve Biodiversity Plan is referred to under Climate Change and Environment. There is reference to Rapid Creek corridor rehabilitation as part of the expenditure of the Environmental Reserve – we are unsure what this project entails. There are no other references to bushland areas.

We assume the management of bushland, including areas in the Rapid Creek catchment, comes under Parks and Reserves. However we would like to see the bushland management budget listed separately to ensure continued resources are applied to this important part of our city. We see the various management activities on bushland (revegetation, weed management, fencing and other access control, litter and illegal dumping management, soil erosion and sediment control and trail maintenance etc.) as crucial to the health of Darwin's environment.